

Title: Student Complaints Procedure

Managed by: Academic Registrar

Approved by:

Department: Academic Services

Date approved: 16th February 2021

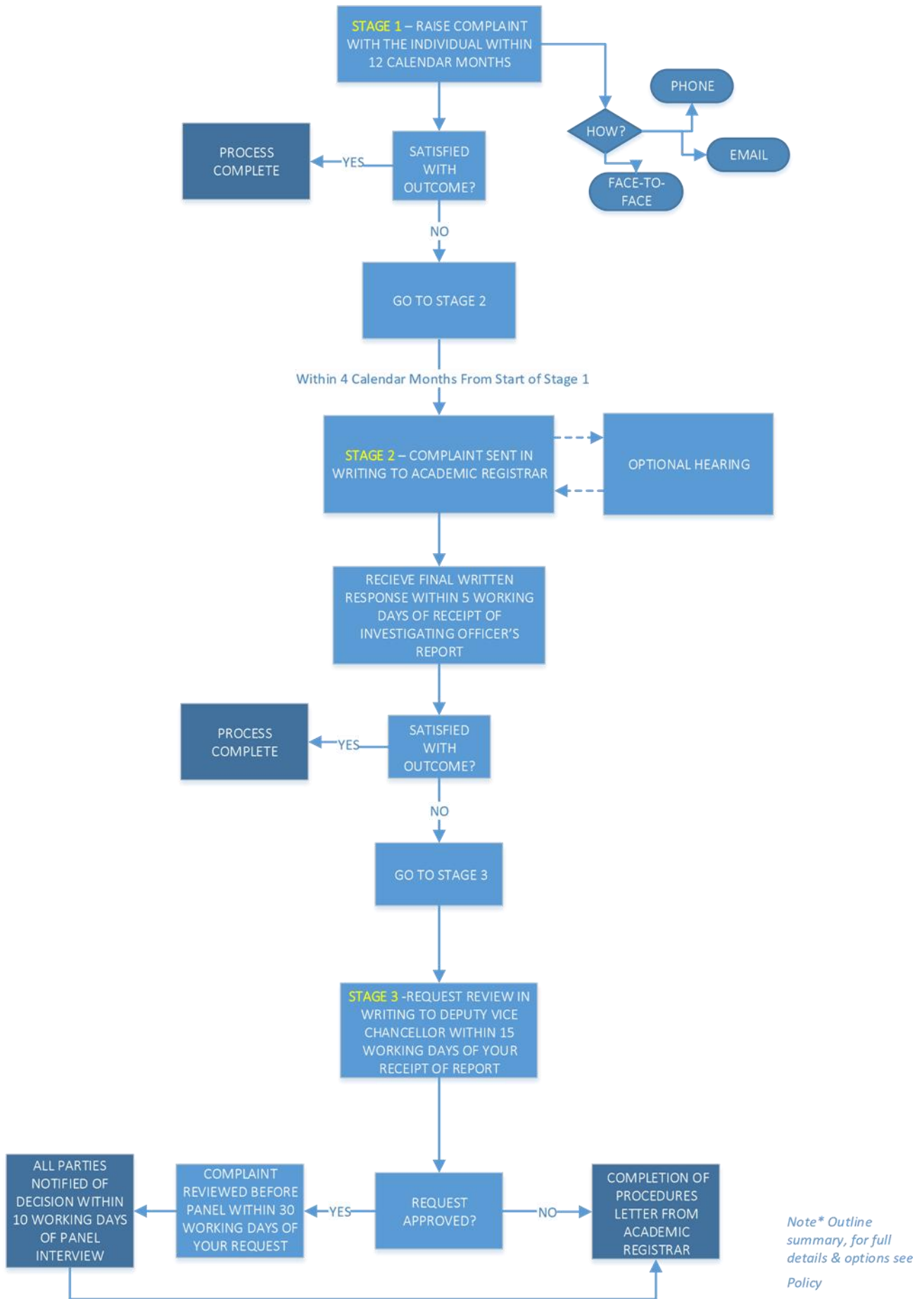
Type of document: Policy

Review date: 15th January 2021

Version Control

| Version number | <i>Purpose/change</i> | <i>Name and job title</i> | <i>Date (DD/MM/YYYY)</i> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1.0 | Periodic update | Academic Registrar | 01/09/2017 |
| 1.1 | Periodic update | David Cunningham, Academic Registrar | 15/01/2021 |
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Forward: Flow Chart of Complaints Procedure



1. Introduction

This procedure provides a mechanism for addressing concerns raised by students promptly, fairly and effectively in order to help the Royal Agricultural University achieve the highest quality in its student experience.

2. Guiding Principles

2.1. The University seeks to minimise student complaints by ensuring that students have opportunities to participate in formal decision-making processes at all levels and by encouraging regular feedback through the student rep system.

2.2. In the event that you are dissatisfied with a University Service, the University seeks to:

- a) Resolve the matter at the earliest opportunity
- b) Investigate thoroughly and fairly
- c) Ensure the process is unbiased

2.3. It is the intention of the procedure that complaints are resolved as quickly and at as early a stage as is possible

2.4. In order to achieve this, the University asks that you will have observed your own obligations and raised the problem as soon as it arose

2.5. Details of your complaints will remain confidential to the parties concerned

2.6. In the interest of natural justice, you, and anyone else involved, will be entitled to see all evidence to be considered and to put their case

2.7. If there is to be a panel hearing, everyone involved will have the right of attendance and to be heard

2.8. Anonymous complaints or evidence will not be considered

2.9. If there are allegations of a criminal offence, the University may refer the matter to the police and suspend its own proceedings until the outcome of any criminal proceedings are known

2.10. You will not be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint. However, if it is determined that your complaint is frivolous, vexatious, malicious, abusive or otherwise not made in good faith, the University may consider initiating the disciplinary procedure.

2.11. Immediate timescales are expressed in University working days. This means Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays and University closure days.

3. Who may use this procedure and in what circumstances?

3.1. You may only use this procedure if you are a currently registered student at the Royal Agricultural University or, in the case of taught students, if your complaint is submitted within the four calendar weeks following cessation of your registration. If you are postgraduate research student, you may use the procedure until four calendar weeks after you have been notified of your final award or notice of withdrawal.

3.2. The procedure is available for you to raise concerns about your University experience (e.g. teaching, supervision or support services)

3.3. This procedure does not cover academic appeals which are dealt with under the Appeals Procedure, contained in the General Rules for Academic Assessment.

3.4. This procedure does not deal with allegations of bullying or harassment which are dealt with by the Bullying & Harassment Policy.

3.5. This procedure does not deal with student disciplinary matters which are dealt with by the Student Discipline Policy and Procedure.

3.6. The procedure is for the use of individual students only. Where several students share a concern and wish to raise the matter as a group, they should do so under stage 1 via the student rep system. Where this fails to resolve the problem, the student complainants may then raise the matter via individual complaints direct to stage 2 (the Formal Stage).

4. Before you complain

4.1. Before initiating a complaint, you may wish to seek further information. Amongst those who may be able to help are the following:

- Student Programme Representatives
- Student Union Officers
- Academic Services staff
- Your personal tutor
- If you are a PGR student: your supervisor

5. How to complain

5.1. There are three stages to the University's Complaints Procedure. In summary, they are:

Stage 1. Informal Resolution

At this stage, you should raise the issue with the person directly responsible. If you feel unable to do this, members of the Student's Union, Student Services staff, or where you are complaining with others, your student representative, with your consent, will help you. You may not raise a formal complaint unless: i. you can demonstrate that you first raised the matter informally within the specified timescale and ii. you are not satisfied with the outcome of informal resolution.

Stage 2. Formal Complaint

At this stage you should ensure your complaint is put in writing via student.complaints@rau.ac.uk and addressed to the Academic Registrar (or nominated representative). You should ensure that you explain with whom you raised the matter informally, the outcome and why you remain dissatisfied.

Stage 3. Review of Outcome

At this stage you should refer your complaint to the Vice Chancellor via student.complaints@rau.ac.uk. This may only be done if the first two stages have been completed and you still remain dissatisfied with the outcome. You are invited, when making your complaint, to indicate what resolution you are seeking, without prejudice to any final remedy. You are reminded an informal resolution to your complaint is possible at any stage.

In addition, if you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, once all University procedures have been exhausted, you have the option to submit your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator ("OIA"), Normally, you will need a Completion of Procedures letter from

the University to do so (see 7.3).

6. The Procedure

6.1. Stage 1 – The Informal Stage

As the first stage it is expected you will make every reasonable attempt to raise the complaint with the responsible individual, face to face, by email or telephone as soon as possible after the event which is the subject of the complaint and in all cases within twelve calendar months of that event. In turn, the responsible individual will make every effort to resolve your complaint at this level. It is recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances where you consider that you cannot approach the individual concerned directly. In such cases, you may seek help from someone else such as your personal tutor, a member of Academic Services staff, the Students Union or where you are complaining with others, your student representative. You, the person you raised the complaint with and any other parties to the complaint at this stage are advised to keep a note of the complaint, including the date first raised at Stage 1. If, having raised the matter within the above timescale and the individual concerned having had an opportunity to respond, you are not satisfied with the outcome, you may then proceed to Stage 2.

6.2. Stage 2: The Formal Complaint Stage

6.2.1. In order for the complaint to be considered formally, you must put the complaint in writing and send it to the Academic Registrar. Your details, the details/date of the complaint, the remedy sought and any supporting evidence should be included. You should also explain how the matter has been raised informally, the dates for this and why you remain dissatisfied. You should include an email or other written confirmation to verify that the matter has been raised informally.

6.2.2. No complaint will be accepted formally unless: i. this is made within 4 calendar months of you first raising the matter informally at Stage 1, ii. you are not satisfied with the outcome and iii. you meet the conditions laid out at 3.1 above at the point of making the formal complaint

6.2.3. You should expect to receive an acknowledgement of receipt from the Academic Registrar or their nominee within five University working days. If your formal complaint is considered inadmissible because the event concerned took place more than 12 months before you initiated the informal stage, or because the informal stage was initiated by you more than 4 calendar months ago, this acknowledgement will be accompanied by a Completion of Procedures letter (see 7.3).

6.2.4. The Academic Registrar or their nominee will identify an appropriate person to investigate the complaint, known as the Investigating Officer. This should normally be a senior person in the school or department in which the matter arose. However, the complaint must not be investigated by any person who is the subject of, or who has a direct personal interest in the outcome of, the complaint. Where necessary and in order to avoid such conflict, the matter will be investigated by an appropriate person in another school or department.

6.2.5. The Investigating Officer will gather the evidence necessary to evaluate the merit of the complaint, and may convene a hearing if necessary, extending an invitation to you and all parties to the complaint to attend. You and other parties to the complaint may each bring one companion to the hearing, in your case normally a fellow student, staff member or a RAUSU representative. Parties to the complaint may not be accompanied by someone acting in a legal representative capacity.

6.2.6. The Investigating Officer will, within twenty University working days of the acknowledgement of receipt at 6.2.3, provide to the Academic Registrar a written report of their findings and recommendations for any action to be taken in response to the complaint. If the

Investigating Officer cannot meet the timescale, they must provide an interim report to you and the Academic Registrar setting out the reasons for this delay and the expected date by which the final report will be available to the Academic Registrar

6.2.7. The Academic Registrar will review the Investigating Officer's report to ensure that the procedure has been followed, that there has been an objective consideration of the evidence and that the reasons for the conclusion and recommendations are clear.

6.2.8. The Academic Registrar will provide a final written response to you and the other parties to the complaint within five University working days of receipt of the report. If this deadline cannot be achieved because of unavoidable delay or the Academic Registrar is not satisfied that the matter has been investigated fully and fairly and in accordance with the procedure, this will be communicated to you and the other parties together with an expected date for the delivery of the written response which can be no later than forty University working days from the date of acknowledgement of receipt at 6.2.3.

6.2.9. If you have not asked to take the matter to Stage 3 (6.3 below) within fifteen University working days following the issue to you of the Academic Registrar's final report, it will be taken that you are satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2. In certain circumstances the Academic Registrar may then issue you with a Completion of Procedures letter (see 7.3); if applicable this will be within twenty University working days of the issue of their final report at 6.2.8.

6.2.10. The Academic Registrar will keep a record of all complaints made under formal or informal procedure, their outcome, and a profile of complainants, to allow trends to be identified and acted upon.

6.3 Stage 3: The Review of Outcome Stage

6.3.1. If your complaint is not resolved under Stage 2, you may, within fifteen University working days of being provided with the final written response to your complaint at 6.2.8, request a review. You will need to demonstrate that

- the original complaint was not fully and fairly investigated, or
- adequate reasons were not given for the outcome of the complaint, or
- the complaints procedure was not followed, or
- fresh evidence, that was not available during the original investigation, has become available

6.3.2. No new grounds for complaint may be raised at Stage 3 but you may submit further evidence in support of your original case

6.3.3. Your request for review must be made in writing to the Deputy Vice Chancellor¹ who will make a decision on whether to allow this, within fifteen University working days of receipt of your request

6.3.4. If the Deputy Vice Chancellor determines that there are no grounds for review, or if your request for review is made outside the required timescale, the Academic Registrar will issue you with a Completion of Procedures Letter (see 7.3) within twenty University working days of receipt of your request for review at 6.3.3

6.3.5. If the Deputy Vice Chancellor is satisfied that you have demonstrated there are grounds for review, a Complaints Panel will be convened, meeting within thirty University working days of receipt of your request for review at 6.3.3 to consider the original complaint and its investigation.

¹ or nominee, throughout document

6.3.6. The Complaints Panel will comprise members nominated by the Deputy Vice Chancellor and include:

- Head of School or department
- Another senior member of staff
- A Student, identified by the Deputy Vice Chancellor in consultation with the Chair of the Student's Union,

No member of the Panel or clerk may have been associated with the complaint, investigation or outcome to date.

6.3.7. The Deputy Vice Chancellor will appoint one of the members to chair the Panel and nominate an additional member of staff to clerk the panel.

6.3.8. The panel date, invitation to attend and documentation for the Panel meeting (outlining the original complaint, the investigation of the complaint, the original outcome and the request and reasons for the review) will be provided to you and the other parties to the complaint no less than seven University working days before the Panel is due to meet.

6.3.9. You and the other parties to the complaint will be invited to provide written comments on the papers, identifying any omissions or inaccuracies. A reasonable deadline for the receipt of your comments will be set.

6.3.10. You and the other parties to the complaint will be asked to confirm whether you wish to attend for an interview with the Panel and if so whether you will be accompanied. You and the other parties to the complaint may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or other supporter who in your case would usually be a member of the University or the Student Union. Neither you nor the other parties to the complaint may be accompanied by someone acting in a legal representative capacity. If you and/or the other parties to the complaint are unable to attend the Panel meeting or comply with the timescales this will not invalidate the proceedings and the meeting may be held in your and/or their absence.

6.3.11. All papers together with your comments, will be circulated to the Panel at least two University working days before the Panel is due to convene

7. Complaints Panel Protocol

7.1. The Panel will convene initially only in the presence of the clerk to ensure the necessary documentation is in place and identify any particular aspects of the complaint or its investigation that the Panel wishes to explore.

7.2. The Panel will invite you to outline your initial complaint, any efforts you had made to resolve the matter and reasons why you have requested a review of the complaint investigation and outcome. The Panel members may ask you questions to clarify any issues. The Panel may then ask you to leave the meeting while it invites others to attend before the panel and to respond to the issues you have raised. You may be asked by the Panel to return to meet with the panel to address or clarify any further matters raised.

7.3. The Panel will then retire to consider its decision. The Panel will inform you, and the other parties to the complaint in writing within ten University working days as to the Panel's decision. The Panel will set out whether your complaint should be upheld, any remedy or redress and its views on the conduct of the original investigation of your complaint. This will be accompanied by a Completion of Procedures letter including:

- a summary of the complaint you have made;
- the title of the regulations/procedures that were applied;
- a summary of the issues considered at the last applicable stage of the University's internal procedures;
- the final decision taken by the University;
- the reasons for that decision;
- information about the role of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator ("OIA") - see also <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/how-to-make-a-complaint.aspx>;
- the deadline for bringing a complaint to the OIA (within 12 months of your receipt of the University's Closure of Procedures letter).

8. Monitoring

8.1. You are advised to keep your own record of the complaint from the informal stage, including the date first raised under Stage 1, as are the person you raised the complaint with and any other parties involved. The University will keep a record of all complaints made from Stage 2 onwards and their outcome. This will enable it to monitor matters that are a cause for concern and take steps to address such concerns. It will also help the University ensure that complaints are dealt with properly and consistently.

Contact us

For any queries concerning this policy please contact Academic Services via student.complaints@rau.ac.uk